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ABSTRACT

Monetary support is essential to the survival of speech interpretation programs in the 1980s, and the community is one viable alternative to dwindling academic channels of support. Two strategies have proved vital to securing community support for the interpretation program at an Indiana university: (1) networking, maintaining a group of faculty and staff to establish contacts with resource people in the community; and (2) audience analysis, locating groups of citizens, corporations, and grant agencies with needs and interests similar to those of the interpretation program. The process of securing and maintaining community support is awesome, challenging, and continuous, and the greater the reward from the community, the higher the expectations from the institution. Survival is dependent upon realizing the limitations of present channels of support and then recognizing that there are alternative channels. (HTH)

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COMMUNITY SUPPORT: A SURVIVAL TACTIC FOR INTERPRETATION PROGRAMS

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Community Support:
A Survival Tactic For
Interpretation Programs

The 1979 journal, Issue in Interpretation, dealt with the very same problem we are discussing today--survival. The respondents included those individuals who could provide insight into the key characteristics of a successful and growing academic program in interpretation. Four characteristics were common to all the responses: two-way communication, belief in the field, growth, and balance in the goals and focus of the program.[1] Speaking for myself as a respondent to the issue of survival in 1984, it is my belief that interpretation programs survive best when they can demonstrate growth in size and quality. Now, neither of these growth factors are possible without adequate monetary support. Therefore, I would argue that monetary support is essential to the survival of interpretation in the eighties. While this is certainly not a novel claim, I advocate that the community is one viable alternative to dwindling academic channels of support. With almost six years of experience in soliciting funds from administrative, student government, and community resources, the latter is not only a reliable, but an extremely generous benefactor.

Fundamental to the notion of community support is the understanding that public and private sectors outside the university can help your program financially through direct, in-kind, and matching funds.[2] Direct funds include actual dollars generated from private individuals, businesses, and grant agencies. In-kind

contributions can be in the form of donated space, costumes, receptions, printing, publicity, and resource people. Matching funds are actual dollars contributed by corporations and foundations in terms of the size of support generated from other sources.

Two strategies have proved vital to securing community support. The first is networking or the process of creating communication links between people and clusters of people.[3] The second strategy is audience analysis which is a powerful tool for motivation. Both of these strategies complement the focus of the interpretation program at Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne--the study and performance of literature as it affects society.

There are two major networks which operate in our interpretation program. The network within the university is composed of faculty (departmental and interdepartmental), students, staff, and administrators. These individuals have enabled me to establish contacts with resource people in the community. Networking with the performing arts center, businesses, and volunteer service organizations has generated visibility and interest for the interpretation program.

One example of the support produced by the density and reciprocity of the networking is the link which influenced the funding of two major grants. The first grant that I wrote was rejected by a corporation whose national headquarters was located in Fort Wayne. In the rejection letter, the corporate director of grants recommended that I contact a local citizen whose proposal

had been funded. It was the director's opinion that the local citizen and I might share similar interests in creative endeavor. Not only did we share similar interests, but we discovered that we had similar needs. The local citizen was looking for creative programs which would induce discussion about social issues in a televised format. I was looking for a nonacademic outlet to introduce interpreters theatre to the community. Through our mutual efforts, three interpreters theatre productions, which focused on social issues, were aired. The casts for the productions were members of both the university and the community networks. Based on audience feedback, I revised one of the productions and submitted the idea as a grant proposal to the Indiana Committee for the Humanities. The letters of support which accompanied the proposal were written by university and community members who had participated in the original production. The proposal, "Galileo and the Twentieth-Century Scientist," received over $7000 in direct funds from the humanities council to tour four northern Indiana cities. The reciprocity of the network is still in effect with another grant. Recently, I served as a consultant on the local citizen's grant proposal, "The Social Issues of 1984." I produced a list of ten humanists within the university who were willing to serve on this project sponsored by a notable organization within the community--the public library.

Just as networking is essential to securing community support, so too is audience analysis. In fact, the two strategies are

interrelated. Who should be contacted for money or volunteer services and what the needs of the community are require both networking and audience analysis. I have found that interpretation events which focus on the social issues or interests of the community tend to receive favorable responses. However, the favorable responses (direct, in-kind, or matching funds) come most often from target audiences; that is, those groups of citizens, corporations, and grant agencies which have similar needs and interests as the interpretation program. To achieve this kind of match, I have incorporated research on audience demographics, long-range planning, evaluation, and networking in my endeavors. These procedures have provided the interpretation program with well-focused and feasible objectives targeted to a specific, rather than a general audience in the community. The support has been generous, consistent, and beneficial to both the university and the community.

The principle of audience analysis establishes a framework within which one can begin to understand the attitudes and needs of the community. It is important to remember, however, that what your interpretation program can do for the community must be analyzed in terms of the program's goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Analysis of the audience in the community must be complemented by analysis of the goals and needs of the university, and in particular by the strengths of your program's greatest resource--the student participants. If the focus of your program is disproportionate to the abilities of its participants, then the output can become counterproductive.

Armed with the tools of networking and audience analysis, the interpretation program at Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne has reaped the advantages and disadvantages of community support. We have a program that is modest in size and growing in quality. But the alternative method of achieving that growth through community support is not without its problems. The process of securing and maintaining community support is awesome, challenging, and continuous. Bear in mind that the greater your reward from the community, the higher the expectations from your institution. Let me use a personal example. While my dean awaits the status of my next grant proposal, I await the dean's decision on the allocation for next year's interpretation program. Budget proposals must be written regardless of the source of the funds; yet the more successful I am at soliciting funds from the community, the less successful I am at soliciting funds from the university. And, the amount of direct funds, whether from the university, the community, or both, changes from year to year based on 1) the status of the economy, 2) the interest in the program, 3) the competition for the funds, and 4) the turnover of the decisionmakers.

Clearly the survival of the interpretation program at Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne and at other universities in the eighties is dependent upon <u>realizing the limitations of channels of support</u> and then <u>recognizing that there are alternative channels of support</u> -- one of which is the community.

Notes

[1]Issues in Interpretation, 4, No. 1, (1979), 1-17.

[2]The term community as used in this paper refers to those members of the public and private sector outside the university. The geographical location of those citizens is broadest in scope in reference to a commuter university.

[3]John Naisbitt, Megatrends (New York: Warner, 1984), p. 215.